Gouvernement du Québec
Conseil supérieur de l'éducation

Comité protestant

BILAN ET PERSPECTIVE

(*version anglaise*)

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Introduction

Traditionally and by law the Comité protestant, composed of fifteen members representing the Protestant churches, parents and educators, has made known directly to the ministre de l'Éducation the concerns of the community which it is mandated to represent. Its Chairman, by virtue of his office a member of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, brings to that advisory body the points of view of its constituent.

Twenty years after its reconstitution following the major reforms in education of the 1960s, the Comité protestant of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation is involved in a process of re-evaluation, re-assessment, re-viewing, re-vitalizing and re-newal. In this connection it has more recently developed a degree of political awareness, a recognition of the renewed interest in the Protestant sector's Christian heritage, a sense of the importance of fluency in French, while maintaining a broad knowledge of the education scene — all this presenting a real challenge to prospective members.

There appear to be three major trends which have influenced the composition of our school system in the last two years: (1) the change in the character of our school clientele caused by the continuing effects of Law 101, which sends immigrant children to the French school, the decline in birth-rate and the trend of population movement westward; (2) the phenomenal growth of the French Protestant sector, caused in part by the choice of anglophone parents to send their children to the French school and more especially by the rapid growth of francophone, Protestant churches, whose numbers have more than doubled since 1976; and (3) the on-again, off-again government projects aimed at changing the educational structures that have mobilized our energies.

The present government's intention to restructure the public school system is viewed by most of the population in the Protestant educational sector with apprehension, as a danger to its institutions and to the organizations which act as support system. There are divergent views as to the structures which should emerge, because there is a lack of consensus on the objectives of the proposed changes. The confusion of purpose has resulted in a great expenditure of energy, of financial and human resources, as parents, educators, and school commissioners examined the various government proposals and either rejected them or tried to find compromises.

We re-evaluate

Challenge of Diversity

The majority Roman Catholic system is now struggling to accommodate a large number of students whose culture, social experiences and beliefs are varied. The Comité protestant is frequently asked how the Protestant system adapted to such diverse religious and ethnic groups. Seeking consensus amidst diversity is a slow and difficult evolutionary process. The Protestant philosophy of education in Québec was founded upon principles which all Protestants held in common: the sufficiency of Scripture and of reason, respect for the individual conscience and the individual's responsability to answer for himself before God. These fundamental principles were the theme of an advice to the ministre de l'Éducation in January 1983,[1] and are the basis of the proposed revision of the regulation of the Comité protestant.[2] The long experience of diversity within Protestantism served it well when it had to learn to respect others who sought an education in Protestant schools. In the process and not without some difficulty the Protestant system integrated these cultures and ultimately made them partners in the governance, administration and pedagogical levels of the system.

Revision of the Regulation

As it felt the need for new directions the Comité protestant has consulted its many constitutents on a proposed revision of its regulation. Concerned Protestant parents are calling attention to the need to focus once more on the unifying principles that gave commonality of purpose to the Protestant philosophy of education. A new development is the request from representatives of francophone Protestant churches for schools with a clear Christian emphasis. Some parents belonging to mainline Protestant denominations, who are making similar demands, feel that the presence of large numbers of non-Christian children in Protestant schools and the secularization of society have caused the system to lose sight of its objective to educate young people on the basis of the Protestant tradition.

The revised regulation of the Comité protestant is intended to state the goals of the Protestant school, the criteria for recognition as a Protestant school, the objectives of moral and religious education Protestant, the qualifications of teachers and the assurance of support services to the Protestant system.

1. "On the Maintenance of a Viable Protestant Community", adopted January 15, 1982.
2. Adopted May 29, 1981 and amended July 6, 1982, December 15, 1983 and May 25, 1984.

Goals of Protestant Education

The goals of the Protestant school are:

— to provide an education conducive to the fullest development of personality;

— to contribute to the discernment of human values;

— to develop a critical understanding of the full range of its cultural heritage, including the inter-relationships of Jewish and Christian faith, Graeco-Roman civilization, and scientific and technological thought;

— to be aware of and have respect for the religious convictions of the parents (or guardians) whose children attend Protestant schools;

— to promote the search for truth in all fields of human experience, including the moral and religious, while recognizing that each individual must be free to weigh alternative points of view;

— to promote excellence of educational standards open to testing of new ideas whenever and wherever they emerge.

To meet these goals a programme of M.R.E. has been designed and approved. Every student in a school recognized as Protestant must have access to this program, thus placing the responsibility for its implementation on the school authorities. The regulation restates the right of the pupil to exemption and obliges the teacher to respect the differing viewpoints in the class. The regulation also allows the local community to request that the school provide, within the framework of the educational project and, in the moral and religious education program, a more specific denominational teaching.

Education in Human Sexuality

The Comité protestant had occasion to reaffirm to the Ministre that education in human sexuality is an integral part of the moral and religious education program. The Comité endorsed its Chairman's dissidence to the advice of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation on sex education. The Comité maintains that such education needs to be placed within a framework which deals with moral and religious values. The Comité advocates the transmission of a positive image of humanity and its sexuality and places the emphasis on self-esteem and affirmation of spiritual values.

We re-assess

Not since the report of the Parent Commission has any proposed legislation aroused so much concern and anxiety as have the various Bill 40 proposals. The energies of the Comité protestant were taxed to the limit during the past two years as it examined a White Paper which failed to comprehend the Protestant system of education. The subsequent proposed legislation compounded our problems by introducing serious inequities at the expenses of Protestants.

Government Proposals

The Comité protestant had expressed in vigorous terms its opposition to the White Paper, *The Québec School: a Responsible Force in the Community*, in its advice to the ministre de l'Éducation in April 1983.[3] It stated that attitudinal changes do not necessarily follow upon changes in administrative levels of responsibility. The Comité protestant wrote that it would not trade what was the right of Protestants by law, by convention and by tradition. It maintained its earlier declaration that Protestant schools require a support system which constitutionally guarantees services to those schools which are recognized as Protestant.

In September 1983, at the request of the ministre de l'Éducation, monsieur Camille Laurin, the Comité protestant adopted and advice on Bill 40.[4] It argued that the narrow expression of confessionality which the proposed law defined for the Comité and the school jeopardized the system which has evolved successfully for two hundred years.

The proposals contained in Bill 40 would have circumscribed the mandate of the Comité protestant, narrowing the scope of the application of its regulations to the field of Protestant religious education, religious animation and the personnel assigned to them. The authority of the Comité was to be restricted to the approval of the program of religious education as if that alone is the basis for the recognition of a Protestant school. In the present law the mandate of the Comité protestant extends to the entire Protestant school, its program of studies and all of its personnel. We insist that there are more criteria involved in recognition of the Protestant school thant the mere provision of moral and religious education.

Our advice to the previous Ministre also noted the disparity between the services provided for Roman Catholics and those for Protestants and consequently the lack of similar funding for similar services. The school was obliged to offer an auxiliary service program of pastoral animation to Roman Chatholic students whereas religious animation services *might be offered on demand* to Protestant students. This left discretion to the school to offer or not to offer such services. Similarly, the School

3. Adopted January 21, 1983.
4. Adopted September 23, 1983.

Board was to hire a person responsible for the support of Roman Catholic schools and for religious education services and pastoral animation for Roman Catholic students while no Protestant equivalent was provided in law. The Comité insisted that Protestant pupils are entitled to the same services.

The advice of the Comité was forwarded to the Ministre after a requested meeting with him was postponed. Subsequently, the Comité held a press conference to outline its concerns and objections with respect to Bill 40. A later press communiqué to the media protested "the seeming indifference and possible contempt of the Ministre and his aides for Protestants, whether educators or Churches". It cited the lack of a sous-ministre associé to articulate Protestant concerns during the two years that restructuration proposals were under consideration and the long period required to bring its proposed revision of the regulation into effect. In view of its role as advisor to the Ministre by law, the Comité protestant did not request an appearance before the Parliamentary Commission which sat during January and February 1984. However, it did forward a copy of its advice of Bill 40 to every members of the Assemblée nationale. On June 13, 1984 we met with the present incumbent and reiterated our concern.

We re-view

Unlike previous years where one or two school boards were visited by the entire Comité, in 1983-1984 the Comité protestant undertook to visit several places in the province to evaluate the impact of the new moral and religious education programs which were being implemented in the schools. The members went out two by two to spend one or two days in a given school board area. Over the fall and winter months visits included the 250 pupil dissident board of Ste-Agathe, Gaspésia regional board, the large territorial Eastern and Western Québec regional boards, the District of Bedford regional board, and the Protestant School Board of Greater Montréal.

Moral and Religious Education

There was general acceptance fo the new program in moral and religious education and a consensus that the teacher guides were especially helpful and well prepared. Parents said that they like the program and were generally well informed as to the content. Where information was lacking there was some apprehension. Teachers were enthusiastic. One teacher remarked that "teaching moral and religious education allows the teacher to be a person interacting with other people". Another called it the "balance to the computer age". Students were also enthusiastic and felt that the new material was relevant. It allowed them to think for themselves and to find out about the phenomenon of religion in man's life.

Some of the elements of concern which emerged when the Comité members talked to parents, teachers, administrators and students were: the need for more in-service training for teachers in moral and religious education; the availability of workshops at the local level; and the need for more information on possible sources of funding for teacher preparation from the ministère de l'Éducation. Some teachers spoke about the difficulty of dealing with the content of the moral and religious education program when their own teacher-training did not include study of the Bible, religion and ethics. Teachers underlined the problem posed in teaching such a multi-faceted subject if their assignment to moral and religious education was only part of the general teaching task. The recent and continuing growth of moral and religious education in our schools has created a shortage of qualified teachers in this field. This situation is further aggravated by the effects of the present workload provisions of the decrees which cause teachers to be assigned to more than one subject and permit them to be bumped from subject to subject from year to year.

We re-vitalize

The Comité protestant continues to study and to process the remaining curricula and teacher's guides for moral and religious education. It is to be noted that the members of the sub-committee do this work meticulously in an effort to ensure the best possible service to the student and that the Comité has received good collaboration from the Direction de l'enseignement protestant. It should be noted as well that many segments of the Protestant community assisted in the elaboration of this program. The members of the sub-committee have produced a brochure to explain the moral and religious education program to parents.

Teacher Qualifications

In its recommendation to the Ministre de l'Éducation in February 1983 the Comité protestant noted the importance of the research done on its behalf by Professor Nathan Mair's *Quest for Quality*, and urged that this valuable study be recommended as required reading in the curriculum of our teacher-training institutions. With respect to teacher-training the Comité has recommended that the curriculum include courses in the moral and religious development of children, specialized certificates in moral and religious education for elementary and secondary teachers and courses in curriculum development and methodology. We intend to follow up on our recommendation in cooperation with the Faculties of Education and the Ministry.

Teacher Negotiations

The Comité protestant has followed with interest the audiences of the Conseil supérieur de l'Éducation on the state of the teaching profession and supports efforts to encourage a climate of detente. The Comité continues to monitor the effects of negotiations on the climate of the school and its perceived effects on the morale of teachers and the attitude of pupils and parents in the Protestant sector. On two occasions the Comité communicated to the government its reaction to the state of teacher negotiations. In May 1982 the Comité stated that it found it morally reprehensible that in Bill 70 the government sought by whatever means to break a formal contractual agreement. Again, in relation to Bill 111 it was concerned that the government was removing the rights which its employees have under the Charter of Human Rights and the Canadian Constitution.

Pupil services

The Comité made known to the Ministre its reaction to the government policy on student life. While it agreed with the concern for the quality of services, it deplored the lack of pastoral animation for Protestant students. During their visits to the various school boards it was noted by members of the Comité that chaplains and pastoral animators are rare in the schools and at the school board level. Recently some school boards have been made aware of the need for this service by students and parents who see the benefits derived by Roman Catholic students in Protestant schools who have access to pastoral animation services.

Sharing Agreement

In the past year the Comité protestant in collaboration with the Comité catholique and the ministère de l'Éducation has simplified the instructions for sharing agreements. Such agreements provide for moral and religious education and support services to Protestant or Roman Catholic pupils who attend the schools of a board of the other confessionality. The revised instructions emphasize the needs of the pupils and modify the number of supervisory board committees required. We are disturbed to observe that we have not received any sharing agreements involving school boards on the Island of Montréal.

We re-new

New Challenges

The Protestant community will be addressing new challenges in the mid-eighties and the Comité protestant will be expected to be involved in providing new directions to meet these challenges.

One of these challenges is the move toward Christian schools. The Comité has followed the rapid development of Christian schools throughout North America. More recently we have dealt with a request from a group of parents who desire such schools in Montréal. We are aware of a number of groups who seek guidance and who will present similar requests for clearly identifiable Christian schools in the public sector. This phenomenon is assuming increasing importance in Québec, particularly in the French Protestant sector. The Comité intends to dialogue with the various segments of the Protestant community on this issue.

Central to the challenges to be faced will be that of the nature of the Protestant school in the years ahead. The Comité intends to initiate a forum through workshops and conferences which will allow its various constituents to participate in shaping the Protestant school. This will involve discussion of its educational project, of the guidelines for consultation of parents and of the means for providing services for minorities within the changing situation. The Comité protestant recognizes that its clientele changes as do society's values and it intends to continue to provide leadership to these challenges in collaboration with its partners in the Protestant community: parents, educators, church representatives and students. This will require a closer relationship with the Protestant Churches and community and more dialogue with our Roman Catholic counterparts.

The Protestant community while it continues to be diverse and pluralistic will need to address itself to a growing concern about its relevance to a public system of education. Schools boards will be pressed to respond to parental demand for quality education coupled with values which correspond to a more anxious and conservative society. Teachers will need more support from parents, government and employer to enable them to meet not only the demands of technology, but also the strain of an increasing generation gap between older teachers and younger teachers and older teachers and young students.

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